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The forerunners of modern universities were founded in the middle ages as communities of learners who mutually searched for truth and exchanged such glimpses of truth as they saw. That simple but fundamentally powerful notion of the university—communication through community—now seems the most elusive tradition and objective.

In 1968 "Breakdown of Communication" is a truism. Modern life seems to breed paradoxes and ironies; at the same time that mass communication smothers us with more information than we want or could possibly digest, person-to-person, person-to-institution, and in-

stitution-to-person communications seem inadequate—much talk but little understanding.

Accepted community patterns and assumptions, both academic and in society at large, have been atomized, partly by those forces of skepticism, science, and technology nurtured in the university for the benefit of man. At the same time the university, less sure than ever about its own status as a community, is being asked, even told, to serve a whole series of constituencies: the poor, the black, the ill, governments at all levels, industries, and others.

While dilemmas of the university multiply—how to reestablish intramural community and communication; how at the same time to apply knowledge and talent to the problems of the larger world—the student, especially the undergraduate, confronts the dilemmas in the most direct, personal way. Today's student asks the same perennial questions students of the past asked: about the meaning of life and about his and humanity's place in a particular society, in the world, and in the universal scheme of things. But he does not accept such answers as he gets and finds himself frustrated and alienated at the prospect of a changing set of partial answers which do not add up to

a larger coherence. He may feel he is being given pieces to a puzzle without knowing what the solution is supposed to look like and without assurance that he even has the right pieces. It would be fallacious to assume that this generation will reconcile itself to a lack of answers or to the retread answers of the past. Discontent with the course of humanity, if nothing else, bridges the generation, credibility, and communications gaps.

Search for truth was the only basic claim the university made, but its successes in that search have bred other problems. The land-grant college system, for example, has been so successful in expanding agricultural production in both volume and efficiency that the migration of the rural population to city and suburb has been over-stimulated as a result. Solutions to certain problems have a maddening way of creating other whole sets of problems. As the problems become more specialized, so must those who deal with them. Universities have succeeded in training specialists, which means, of course, that the faculty must be specialized to train their future peers.

The faculty specialists have become "experts" and are called on to render services

beyond the university. In so doing they are serving a larger social function than is possible solely within the university. While such contribution is often valuable, it has accelerated the centrifugal forces pulling at the university as a community. The faculty as specialists can confuse and frustrate the undergraduate who has entered the university with the expectation of discussing the abiding questions of humanity with receptive men, only to find his contacts with the faculty limited by the anonymity of large lecture courses and by a lack of the vocabulary necessary to engage the specialist in mutually profitable exchange.

Pressured from within and without, the university is confronted with demands that *as an institution* it attempt to do no less than fulfill the charge of the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States: “. . . establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, . . . promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity. . . .” This the university in fact cannot do, has no legal mandate to do, and in terms of its historic role and purpose should not attempt to do. There is a superficial case to be made for the university to undertake to solve the

problems of race, poverty, war. Universities are great aggregations of knowledgeable men, centers for talents of all kinds—what better institutions to deal with the questions which burn both figuratively and literally? This reasoning may be born out of disillusion with institutions that claimed to have the answers through their political or spiritual ideologies. However, if the university were exclusively to supply or even to supplant these institutions, it would have to sacrifice its own purposes and would, in the end, destroy itself.

Universities are better at asking the right questions than at giving the final answers. Grounded in humane learning and trained in the analytical use of their minds, university graduates can address themselves to the problems, through new or old institutions, or singly, and by whatever routes their talents, training, and inclinations may take them. This general prescription is not new, but the university can no more return to its medieval practices than can a surgeon cure by indiscriminate blood-letting. The viruses of our time come in a plethora of strains. It will take calm and painstaking work to isolate, analyze, and neutralize them.

If the university cannot give itself over entirely to attempts to solve the problems of society, it can, through its policies, programs, curricula, and research, examine the problems with a view toward remedy, and can do so consonant with its fundamental goals. If, however, the university is divided against itself, unsure of its traditional values, of its present practices, and of its future course, it can only flounder in divisiveness to the benefit of no one. That, perhaps, is too pessimistic a prognosis for the future of American universities. Even the current upheavals suggest, perhaps perversely, that there is enough concern, that students and others care enough about the future to exert pressure for what they envision as beneficial change. If the university is to survive as a concerned community, new instruments for communication, which include a broad range of participation from the young and idealistic to the mature and experienced, must be established.

NEW POLICY MAKING GROUPS

Planned opportunities for dialogue among students, faculty, alumni, and the general

public will help in the total assessment of human values. The pace of modern living exaggerates the differences among the generations, and more effective liaison will require more planned communication. But the objective of that communication should be put more clearly before us. To that end a number of Departmental Advisory Committees were established this fall with representation from various members of the George Washington University community, including professors, students, alumni, and friends of the institution. Each committee, after a period of orientation, will be able to offer to the departmental chairman and faculty suggestions for improving the curriculum of that department. From representatives of the public, we might expect that the department would receive a direct playback of the expectations of general citizenry, a view of necessities as they arise from the ever-changing world, and expressions as to the relevance of the subject matter to life. Alumni contributions of much the same character may be expected, but in addition alumni will have the benefit of assessing suggestions in light of their own college and later experience. Participation of faculty from var-

ious disciplines will provide a broader academic context to make each committee relevant to the University at large. Finally, student perspective should be the result of views from majors and from nonmajors, assessing the contributions of courses to specialization as well as to general education. This kind of representative committee, of knowledgeable and dedicated persons, can respond to irrelevance and inadequacy; and the shortcomings which now exist can receive the attention necessary for timely and worthwhile revision.

The graduate and professional schools and colleges of the University already have advisory bodies, organized, however, on a college-wide basis. These groups have from twelve to twenty-five members, depending on the size and number of specialized curricula offered.

Structure, of course, cannot alone change the educational experience, but a vital outcome of the work of such advisory bodies can be the establishment of a mechanism that enables laymen, professors, alumni, and students to meet regularly in order to confront matters of mutual interest. The university of today has found almost impossible the task of bringing

students into a closer relationship with alumni and the public. By inviting additional lay citizens to participate in developing policies for universities, it is expected that more effective liaison will be established with the general public and that such liaison will be particularly helpful in the consideration of community problems—poverty, transportation, and social justice. Generally, university liaison has been closer with wealth than with poverty, stronger in science than in the humanities, and more effective with the professions than with other areas of human endeavor. In seeking a new dialogue with the lay citizen, I think it particularly important to re-emphasize that the dialogue, while including administrative officers and members of the faculty of a university, must also include direct exchange with the students.

The institution itself has tended to become a deterrent rather than a catalyst to better communication. Too often the university has served as a middleman between the student and the corporation, the student and the government agency, the student and the volunteer service, the student and the practitioner, the student and the office holder. In a kind of

tacit "let us do it for you," the university has inadvertently built obstructions among the very constituencies it has sought to serve. Instead of expediting communications the university has again become the barrier.

With the opening of better lines of communication through Departmental Advisory Committees, for example, alumni and representatives from the public can be expected to take a greater interest in the concerns of students and professors, while, on the campus, professors and students can enter into a new and closer working relationship than the social pressures on the student and the scholarly pressures on the professor now permit. Students, widely conscious of the generation gap, will be provided better means for discussion with alumni and the public; and professors, alumni, and laymen must listen regularly and seriously to what students contribute. At the same time the Committee's objective must not be identified with placating one group over another, a compromise with student power, or a preservation of the status quo. The overriding objective must be a more effective educational program for all concerned.

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CITY

When the Congress designated the Federal City College in 1968 "the land-grant college of the District of Columbia," it recognized for urban America a need which more than a hundred years ago a Congress recognized and accepted for rural America. In effect Congress has said that the advancement of our society is dependent, at least to some extent, upon public university programs of teaching, research, and community service.

From the philosophy of the land-grant college system, all higher education, both public and private, has learned much. The great private universities of the country have put the philosophy to work for various segments of the Nation; and teaching, research, and public service today are taken for granted as the legitimate activities of all colleges and universities.

For the many institutions of higher learning within the metropolitan Washington area, this philosophy, coupled with the onrushing needs of the area, makes it mandatory that all colleges and universities respond to these needs

with all possible haste and every ounce of effort. For too long, however, the individual efforts of a single institution, or the efforts of an individual professor or student, have determined the course of action for a given college or university. Such unplanned, sporadic, and small-scale efforts have made little headway in alleviating the major needs of urban America. In Washington it is necessary for all institutions of higher learning to combine their resources through some common mechanisms which will provide the means for full coordinated participation in response to the area's problems. The social, political, economic, and cultural needs of the area are more than all colleges and universities can meet, but institutions of higher learning can no longer be accorded the license to pick and choose, to participate or withdraw, to volunteer or to impose their programs on an unwitting community. Instead, colleges and universities must be invited to contribute their teaching skills to the preparation of people who will work with the ongoing problems, to turn their research upon adequately considered requests for both specific and broad needs of the community, and to participate in such public serv-

ice programs as their peculiar resources will permit.

Across America, both rural and urban universities have treated the rest of society too much like guinea pigs for experimentation. In the fields of the humanities and the social sciences, the prices to be paid by trial and error are too high to be left to the personal interest of an eager professor or to the dogoodism of an academic group. We have probably now reached the point where no public service program based on research should be carried on by a university which does not originate as a considered request by the community itself.

How then may George Washington University be a part of the badly needed response to the manifold needs of metropolitan Washington?

As one university among several institutions of higher learning in the area and as a member of the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area, George Washington must be a senior partner in the total effort of higher education. This means taking major responsibility for organizing the best

possible response to the area's pressing needs; for helping to establish an effective organization for channeling such efforts; for making available all possible personnel and resources for teaching, research, and public service programs; and for committing itself on a long-range basis to the improvement of life and living in urban America.

The institutions of higher learning in Washington, private and public, in order to form an effective organization for response to urban problems, may borrow from the philosophy of service followed over a number of years by such great state universities as Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California. While cooperation among educational institutions is a necessity, it is equally important that appropriate agencies of the federal government and departments of the District government share fully in planning, administering, and operating all programs. The tasks are so many and so great, the resources so limited, and the time so short that the most intensive effort will be required.

By establishing new, broad-based structures for participation, we hope to encourage the development of a true University community which can communicate its concerns within

the University and then beyond; by cooperating with other institutions and by using our talents and resources where most appropriate, we hope to make a real contribution toward ameliorating the urban problems of our time. Neither course can be considered separately; neither is a final solution. We proceed as universities must—not by offering panaceas but by asking the right questions.

—LLOYD H. ELLIOTT
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